

THE STATE PORT PILOT OPINION

EDITORIALS

A tale of two annexations

Involuntary annexation into a town or city is never a pleasant thing. At least in Southport, it might not prove to be a life-changing disaster for most.

Aldermen appeared to genuinely agonize over their decision to grow, with two members having a change of heart. The annexation still passed.

To their credit, aldermen addressed key concerns, particularly the requirement that new areas connect to the city sewer — and pay impact fees — within 60 days. Property owners with functioning septic systems won't have to connect until they sell out or the system fails. Aldermen also set up payment plans and a liberal interpretation on the fees for connections.

For homeowners in the new area, those concessions are welcome. For owners of a restaurant and campground, the decisions could prove the difference between staying in business or posting a "For Sale" sign.

Southport has been under pressure to grow its borders for years. It took Oak Island's bold, previously unannounced attempt to come to Southport's doorstep to spur aldermen into what might fairly be called a modest annexation.

Southport's line seems destined to slide west across the canal. From a planning standpoint, that makes sense.

Aldermen listened to those being annexed and made attempts to soften the blow. From a political standpoint, that makes sense.

Opposition to Oak Island's second attempt to take in land — all the way to N.C. 211 — has garnered organized opposition that includes a statewide network. Opponents might be underdogs, but they are clearly settled in for a fight.

Whatever the outcome, Oak Island town council members should think about answering this question in a year or two: When residents protested, did we really listen? And did we really respond as best we could?

We'll all have to live with the answer.

All dressed up but are they ready to go?

Instead of flying by the seat of their pants, Brunswick County school board members need to take a conservative stance on uniforms.

Last week, a divided board of education approved uniforms for all northern area elementary schools. The policy will take effect at the start of the new school year in August.

Spurred by the enthusiasm from staff at Lincoln Elementary and positive preliminary data from district parents, three board members decided there was enough support to push the policy at Lincoln, Belleville and Town Creek elementary schools.

Two members wanted to take a more cautious approach.

Staff, parents and to a lesser extent students at Lincoln have indeed expressed a desire to don uniforms next school year.

And based on survey results from the other nine elementary schools, it appears that six more have parent support.

But unlike Lincoln Elementary, whose staff spent the last year gathering research, data and opinions, staff at the district's other elementary schools had to conduct their surveys at the last minute.

Requested by chairman Shirley Babson and mandated by district administrators, the polls were conducted just days before the board was set to decide on uniforms at Lincoln Elementary.

There was no consistent countywide approach to collecting information; some sent home questionnaires, others contacted parents through automated telephone messages.

One school polled a "random sample" of parents with variable results. Half of those questioned supported uniforms.

And the surveys conducted via phone messages, while yielding seemingly favorable outcomes, in reality polled only a fraction of parents.

If considered preliminary, the polls show a trend toward support of uniforms. But board members should view those numbers with cautious optimism, since many busy parents were not privy to the phone surveys.

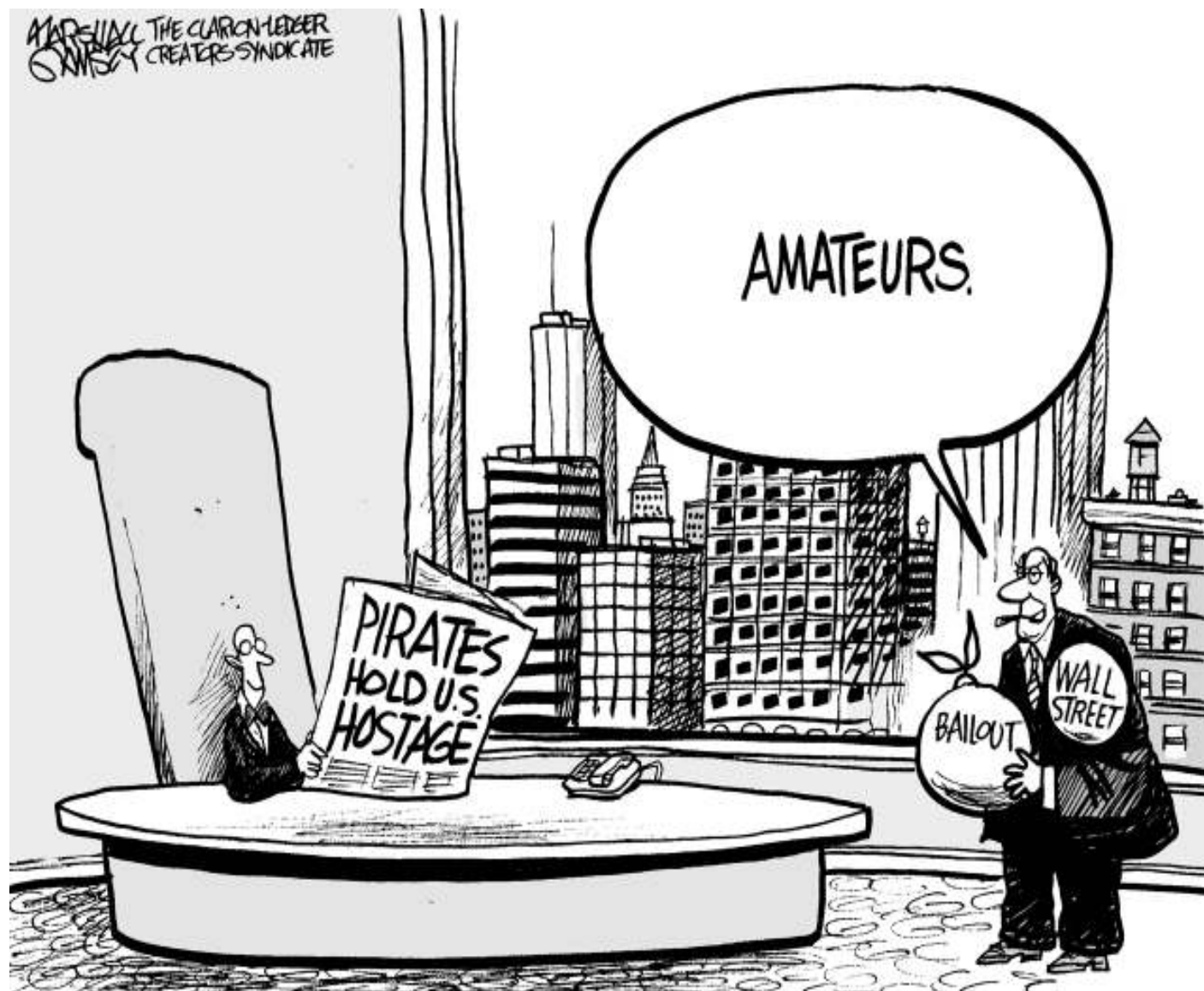
And the board does not yet know if those who did agree with the concept of uniforms would consent to taking up the cost of new clothing and abiding by specific requirements.

With the exception of Brunswick County Academy, an alternative school with a small student population, the district has never fashioned a uniform policy.

The policy may look good now, but when the board gets down to business and decides how to implement and manage the mandate, it might not be so appealing.

Board members should let the school that wants students to wear uniforms — Lincoln Elementary — be the first to sport them so the district can see how well the fashion really fares.

In a county split by stark distinctions in social class, the school board should be commended for its attempt to unite students through school uniforms. But if they continue to make snap decisions the attempt, well suited as it may be, could fall apart at the seams.



Your letters

Got shovel already

To the Editor:
If I hear Obama say "Billions of dollars are ready for shovel-ready projects" I think I will throw up.

Take a ride down 9th Street, Caswell Avenue, Lord Street, West Bay, Fodale or Yacht Basin and look at Southport's "shovel-ready" streets.

Where is the money, Obama?
Pat Dane
Southport

A voice

To the Editor:
If Southport aldermen Paul Fisher and Nelson Adams have their way, citizens would play no part in the business of their own city.

Last Thursday's meeting made that perfectly clear. Alderman Fisher insisted that the contract to build the new fire station be signed immediately with no further discussion. City attorney Mike Isenberg suggested he make the motion contingent on the city setting up financing for the project. Mr. Fisher didn't seem to catch on until others on the board convinced him it was legally prudent. Also, the Local Government Commission requires a public hearing on the matter, as well as review of the minutes of that hearing, before Southport (meaning the taxpayers) can take on the \$3.5-million debt. Why wasn't the hearing done before the board vote? Mr. Fisher showed an obvious disdain for the LGC

Letters policy

The State Port Pilot invites its readers to share opinions on matters of local public interest. Lengthy letters may be edited for space, or may be returned to the writer if editing would significantly alter the content. The writer's address and/or telephone number must be included in case verification is required. No letters will be published without the name of the writer; addresses and telephone numbers will not be published.

Send submissions to Letters to the Editor, *The State Port Pilot*, P. O. Box 10548, Southport, NC, 28461. Our fax number is 910-457-9427. Our e-mail address is pilot@stateportpilot.com.

approval process, and the public, since the hearing will now be a sham.

Alderman Adams went on about why Southport needs to protect its borders to fend-off the invading army from "Long Beach." While there may be good reasons for this annexation, the concerns of the citizens most affected were not addressed.

Aldermen Jim Brown, Adams and Fisher also refused to have the aldermen meet with the State Ports Authority to get an update on the massive port that will be a mile from our city limits. These three, and the former board, passed a resolution in 2006 supporting the project -- with no

public input whatsoever. Do you want your leaders to actively avoid being informed about such a critical issue?

We need much more transparency and accountability in our city government. This is our city and we deserve a voice.

Ken Karn
Southport

Fisheries news

To the Editor:
I am writing to express my appreciation of Bret McCormick's excellent article in the April 8 sports section of *The State Port Pilot* "Game fish" bill nets debate" regarding impending bill H918 seeking gamefish status for redfish and speckled trout in North Carolina.

As is blatantly clear to many, North Carolina is in the dark ages with regard to the husbandry and management of its incredible marine resources. Environmental degradation, commercial overfishing and destructive, wasteful gear practices have made North Carolina the laughing stock of the nation. It is time to address these issues and get North Carolina on the road to recovery.

It is great to finally see some thoughtful, accurate, well-written reporting in local press on this sad state of affairs.

As Mr. McCormick states, NOAA estimates that marine anglers in North Carolina in 2006 generated \$2.5 billion annually in sales to North Carolina businesses, an amount that dwarfs the benefits of the state's commercial fishing activity.

See Letters, next page

NOT EXACTLY NEWS

'Live Green' leaves me green — with envy

Live Green has left me green with envy.

The inaugural music and arts festival, held Saturday in some woods behind a house near Bolivia, was truly a success for first-time organizers Where We Live, a nonprofit group that promotes community involvement.

With Saturday's festival, more than 300 people did just that — got involved — traveling to a rather obscure location in the heart of Brunswick County for a day of fun and camaraderie that defined the term "community."

Led by sisters and group co-founders Jen Iapalucci and Elie Erickson, both residents of Boiling Spring Lakes, a network of friends and volunteers pulled off the yeoman's task of planning and coordinating a sizeable event from scratch. Focusing on eco-friendly living, the festival featured something for everyone while also promoting a worthwhile message.

Yet what's left me envious is not just the stellar planning skills and stylish execution shown by those involved. My envy lies in the drive and motiva-

tion required to put something like this on — of wanting to add something to the community to make that community better.

Rather than complain that an event like this was nowhere to be found here, rather than wish that her favorite band would come through town or that people would learn how to help the environment, Iapalucci put in the effort and made that all happen, not by hosting her own private party but instead by creating an event aimed at everyone's enjoyment. Community: personified.

But beyond the group's accomplishments in putting on the event, providing adequate parking and facilities on top of the attractions, what made the festival a success was everyone who came out to enjoy it, and support it.

Three hours after the music started, more than 200 people, not count-

ing vendors and volunteers, had set up inside the festival and showed no signs of leaving right away. They made a day of it, and that made for its own kind of music. The bands and performers who traveled the length of the state from Asheville had to appreciate that, and even if they've played larger crowds elsewhere, they voiced that appreciation throughout the day.

Those who came out for the area's newest festival certainly saw something new on Saturday — a festival filled with hula-hoops and ukuleles, rock gardens and rockabilly, bluegrass groups and "going green" tips.

But they also made a worthwhile attempt turn into a success, providing encouragement to those putting it on to do so again next year, and the next year. That showing of support spoke volumes for Where We Live, the group and the place, and the sense of community inherent in both.

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